

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 03631 01 OF 02 121341Z

53

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4964

INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 3631

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN PARTY POLITICS

REF: KARACHI 1490, LAHORE 441 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: REPORTS OF DEFECTIONS OF OPPOSITIONISTS TO THE RULING PPP ARE STANDARD FARE NOWADAYS IN PAK PRESS. WITH ELECTIONS NEARING THESE ARE OPPORTUNE TIMES FOR THE POLITICALLY ASPIRING TO BOARD THE BHUTTO BANDWAGON. STATE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES AND THEIR PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING IT PROVIDE LITTLE INSPIRATION FOR HOPEFUL TO REMAIN OUTSIDE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM AS REPRESENTED BY PPP. EMBASSY AGREES WITH CONSULATES GENERAL KARACHI AND LAHORE, WHICH HAVE MADE LARGE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS MESSAGE, THAT PROSPECTS FOR MUCH TALKED ABOUT OPPOSITION UNITY AGAINST BHUTTO ARE NOT PROMISING. END SUMMARY.

1. OVER PAST FEW WEEKS, PACE OF OPPOSITION DEFECTIONS TO RULING PPP HAS SPEEDED UP. REPORTS OF LOCAL NOTABLES BOARDING BHUTTO BANDWAGON WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF FOLLOWERS HAVE BECOME REGULAR DAILY FARE IN PRO-GOVERNMENT
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 03631 01 OF 02 121341Z

PRESS. STORIES FOLLOW STANDARD PATTERN, NEW PPP ADHERENTS

INVARIABLY RECORDING THEIR ADMIRATION FOR THE PM'S DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP, THEIR NEW-FOUND BELIEF IN PPP POLICIES, AND THEIR CONVICTION THAT ONLY RULING PARTY CAN BE TRUSTED TO WORK FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY OF NATION. PUBLIC-CITY GIVEN MASS CONVERSIONS HAS HAD (AND IS INTENDED TO HAVE) CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF MAKING OPPOSITION SEEM INCREASINGLY ISOLATED, SHRUNKEN, AND EVEN IRRELEVANT.

2. LIKE MOST OTHER CURRENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PAKISTAN (ISLAMABAD 3602), SPATE OF DEFECTIONS CAN BEST BE VIEWED IN CONTEXT OF UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS. ACCORDING MANY SOURCES, BHUTTO HAS STEPPED UP HIS WOOING OF OPPOSITIONISTS, TARGETTING IN ON THOSE WITH LOCAL INFLUENCE WHOSE VOTE BANKS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO WHOPPING MAJORITY PM CLEARLY WISHES TO WIN WHEN BALLOTING TAKES PLACE IN 1976-77 COLD SEASON. HE HAS DONE SO, MOREOVER AT TIME WHEN THOSE WHO LINGER OUTSIDE PPP FOLD ARE PARTICULARLY VUNERABLE TO BLANDISHMENTS FROM SUCH PAST MASTER OF POLITICAL ART AS BHUTTO. PPP OFFICES ARE ABOUT TO BE REDISTRIBUTED IN LONG-HERALDED PRE-ELECTION REORGANIZATION OF PARTY. THIS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY EVEN MORE CRUCIAL PROCESS OF DETERMINING (BHUTTO HAVING THE DECISIVE SAY) WHO IS TO GET PARTY NOMINATIONS, THE MUCH-PRIZED "TICKETS", TO CONTEST NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS. THESE TICKETS ARE INCREASINGLY VIEWED AS SURE PASSPORTS TO LEGISLATIVE OFFICE, AND ASPIRING POLITICIANS ARE NO DOUBT AWARE THAT IF THEY DO NOT PUT THEMSELVES IN A POSITION TO GET THEM, THEIR PROSPECT OF ELECTION WILL BE BLEAK INDEED. AND, OF COURSE, THE SNOWBALL EFFECT IS IN FULL OPERATION: THE MORE WHO JOIN THE PPP, THE MORE THOSE WHO RESIST RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS VIRTUAL POLITICAL SUICIDE TO CONTINUE TO DO SO. AS CONGEN LAHORE HAS OBSERVED, NOW IS PRIMETIME FOR ALL SMART MEN TO COME TO THE AID OF PPP.

3. STATE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES AND THEIR PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING IT IN ANY EVENT PROVIDE LITTLE INSPIRATION FOR HOPEFUL TO REMAIN OUTSIDE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM AS REPRESENTED BY PPP. FAMILIAR HARRASSMENT TECHNIQUES CONTINUE TO BE USED AGAINST OPPOSITIONISTS; THESE WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 03631 01 OF 02 121341Z

DRAMATICALLY HIGHLIGHTED BY ARREST OF SENATOR HANIF RAMAY (LAHORE 419). FOR ITS PART, OPPOSITION SEEMS NEITHER WILLING NOR ABLE TO BOLSTER ITS POSITION. TAKING STOCK OF THEIR MEAGER RESOURCES (FEW DYNAMIC LEADERS, LITTLE MONEY, DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING ELECTORATE), SOME OPPOSITION CHIEFTAINS ARE CARRYING ON INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS LOOKING TOWARD COOPERATION DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND AT POLLS. EVEN MOST OPTIMISTIC

ADMIT THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF FORGING A COMPROMISE
CAMPAIGN PLATFORM WHICH THEY ALL COULD SUPPORT. THEIR
MAXIMUM OBJECTIVE NOW SEEMS TWOFOLD: TO REACH NO-CONTEST

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 03631 02 OF 02 101033Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 3631

AGREEMENTS UNDER WHICH ONLY ONE OPPOSITON NOMINEE
WOULD OPPOSE RULING PARTY CANDIDATE IN EACH CONSTITUENCY
AND TO AGREE ON CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH OPPOSITION WOULD
OR WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN POLLS. TO ACHIEVE EVEN
THESE MORE MODEST GOALS WOULD REQUIRE THAT OPPOSITION
LEADERS SUBMERGE THEIR FORMIDABLE EGOS AND BURY THEIR
MUTUAL SUSPICIONS, WHICH SEEMS IMPROBABLE AT THIS
WRITING. BHUTTO, OF COURSE, CAN BE EXPECTED EXPERTLY
TO EXACERBATE INTRA-OPPOSITION DISAGREEMENTS AND TO
TRIGGER FURTHER DEFECTIONS TO PPP IN PROCESS.

4. LATEST WORD HAS IT THAT UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT (UDF)
GENERAL COUNCIL WILL MEET IN LAHORE APRIL 24. ACCORDING
PRESS REPORTS, "JOINT MANIFESTO" WILL BE PRESENTED TO
COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL AND FINISHING TOUCHES WILL BE
PUT ON UDF'S LONG-PROJECTED MEET-THE-PEOPLE CAMPAING.
UDF VICE PRESIDENT NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KHAN REPORTEDLY

STATED THAT UDF HAS DECIDED TO EXTEND INVITATION TO
NEWLY-FORMED NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY TO JOIN FRONT --
HE DECLARED TEHRIK AND JUP WOULD BE EQUALLY WELCOME --
AND ASSERTED THAT NO UDF MEMBER WOULD COOPERATE WITH
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 03631 02 OF 02 101033Z

NON-FRONT PARTIES WITHOUT RECEIVING PRIOR FRONT
APPROVAL. LATTER STATEMENT WAS APPARENTLY INTENDED TO
SPIKE REPORTS THAT PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE HAD RECENTLY
APPROACHED TEHRIK AND JUP ABOUT FORMING SEPARATE
JOINT ELECTORAL ALLIANCE. (THERE HAS BEEN SOME SPECU-
LATION THAT TWO OPPOSITION FRONTS MAY EMERGE - A LEFT
CENTER GROUPING COMPRISING NDP, PAKISTAN DEMOCRATIC
PARTY, AND JUI; AND A RIGHT-CENTER GROUP COMPOSED OF
TEHRIK, JUP, AND PML. THIS RATHER TOO SYMMETRICAL
PATTERN EXCLUDES THE JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI, WHICH REALISTIC
OPPOSITION FIGURES ADMIT IS ONLY PARTY WHICH CAN BOAST
A DEDICATED CADRE AND ADEQUATE CAMPAIGN FUNDS. JUI
LEADER MUFTI MAHMOOD STATED IN LAHORE APRIL 1 THAT
SPECULATION ABOUT RIGHT-WING ALIGNMENT WAS BASELESS,
BUT MORE IDEOLOGICALLY-MINDED OBSERVERS CONTINUE TO
ENGAGE IN IT.)

5. OVER COMING MONTHS, BHUTTO AND OPPOSITION CHIEF-
TAINS ARE EXPECTED TO BEGIN WARY SIGNALLING REGARDING
CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH CAMPAIGNING AND POLLING WILL
TAKE PLACE. OPPOSITION IS PAINFULLY AWARE THAT TACTI-
CAL INITIATIVE RESTS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY WITH PM; HE
IS PRESUMED TO UNDERSTAND THAT IF HE CONTINUES TO
INDULGE IN WIDESPREAD HARRASSMENT OF OPPOSITION
NOTABLES; CURBS ON PRESS, ASSEMBLY, AND MOBILITY; AND
MISUSE OF ADMINISTRATION AND POLICE FOR PARTISAN ENDS,
OPPOSITION PARTIES WILL SEEK UNITEDLY TO BOYCOTT POLLS,
SUCH A BOYCOTT WOULD PROVE AWKWARD FOR BHUTTO, AS
WITHOUT SEMBLANCE OF A CONTEST PPP VICTORY WOULD BE
CONSIDERABLY DEVALUED. YET, AT THIS TIME, OPPOSITION
AGREEMENT MERELY REGARDING MINIMAL CONDITIONS FOR
THEIR PARTICIPATION IN CAMPAIGN AND POLLING WOULD
REPRESENT A NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENT. THEY DO NOT UNDER-
ESTIMATE BHUTTO'S ABILITY TO BREAK A PRO-BOYCOTT
FRONT THROUGH SEPARATE "SWEETHEART" DEALS WITH ONE OR
MORE OPPOSITION GROUPS. NEITHER DO WE.
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